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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000091

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SUBJECT: VP ADEL ABDEL MEHDI: KEEP PRESSURE ON MALIKI

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S) Summary: Vice President Adel Abdel Mehdi told S/I Satterfield January 12 that ISCI fully supports the USG position that the Maliki government must reform in order to operate in a more inclusive and effective manner. However, Adel opined that Prime Minister Maliki is misreading USG attitudes toward his government and believes that if he can stave off pressure to reform, by June his position will be secure till 2009. The VP said the message from Secretary re changing the way the GOI worked - not/not changing the PM - was very clear, but that the USG did not always speak with one voice to ISCI on this point. Adel said he detected an overall softening of views across the Iraqi political spectrum, and that the moment was ripe for Maliki to become more serious about power-sharing and inclusion. Maliki and Iraq's top leaders have discussed empowering a "secretariat" to oversee implementation of decisions taken by the "Three Plus One" and "Five Leaders" mechanisms. Adel provided us a copy of a paper sent by the Kurds to Maliki that outlines a multi-step program to "solve Iraq's crisis" through increased reliance on "Three Plus One." The Kurds and ISCI continue to support Maliki, Adel claimed, but their patience is limited. He expressed guarded optimism that the CoR would pass the De-Baathification Law and the 2008 Budget in the coming weeks, but warned the Provincial Powers bill would take more time. He said his recent trip to Tehran had helped improve Iranian understanding of the GOI-USG Strategic Partnership Declaration of Principles. End Summary.

We'll Try to Make it Work with Maliki, But Send a Single USG Message

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12. (S) In stark contrast to the upbeat assessment that he routinely serves up to visiting dignitaries, Adel appeared glum as he used terms such as "total stagnation" and "fragmentation" to describe GOI failure to improve Iraq's economic, political, and social situations. He said the GOI can claim only partial credit for progress in the security field. Satterfield explained the USG shares this assessment and has sent Maliki a strong message that he cannot succeed as a national leader unless he works much more cooperatively with all major Iraqi political leaders. Adel said that while he understands the USG message of support for a change in the operating nature of the Iraqi Government and not a change of the government itself, he claimed some ISCI leaders have received "conflicting signals from Washington". He stressed the importance of a clear USG message on the need for the GOI to act as an effective national government.

13. (S) Adel opined that Maliki continued to misread USG attitudes (for example, he interpreted a critical Kurdish letter in December as Kurdish capitulation to USG pressure) and divulged that Maliki appears to believe that if he can hang on until June, his job will be safe until 2009 because the USG will become increasingly distracted by November elections. Adel said the Kurds and ISCI are ready to make

another strong effort to work with Maliki ("we will do this with our minds but not with our hearts") but warned that such efforts must produce results because patience is limited. He shared a copy of a January 11 Kurdish letter to Maliki (President Talabani - septel - told Satterfield that ISCI leader Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim endorsed the text) that outlines a multi-step program to "solve the crisis" (translation will be sent to NEA/I). He remarked that Sistani's view of the Maliki government is similar to that of the USG, noting that Sistani and the other Marja'iyyah are angry that Maliki's failure has contributed to national disunity but believe that a change of PM at the present time will only worsen the situation.

¶4. (C) Adel noted that he has detected a general softening of views and increased flexibility across the Iraqi political spectrum, beginning with an apparent new-found willingness by Maliki to respond to entreaties that he govern in a more inclusive manner. To this end, Maliki and Iraq's top leaders have discussed a "secretariat" of empowered representatives of Iraq's top leaders to oversee and enforce implementation of decisions taken by the "Three Plus One" and "Five Leaders" mechanisms. Nothing will happen in the next 4-5 days, Adel said, as Maliki's doctors have advised the ailing PM to rest and not attend meetings.

¶5. (C) Adel maintained that the overall softening of approach extends also to the Sunnis, including fellow Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi. He attributed growing Sunni flexibility to the challenge of intra-Sunni political competition posed by the Anbar Awakening, desire to improve relations with the Kurds, and discontent within Tawafuq. He surmised that Hashemi's rigid stances may have been influenced by non-Iraqi Muslim Brotherhood sources. As evidence of a shift in the

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Sunni approach, Adel said that Sunnis are now talking in positive terms about federalism and the constitution, and he noted with approval that Hashemi included Shia representatives in his delegation during a recent trip to Kuwait in which he pushed a nationalist, non-sectarian vision for Iraq. Adel said he thinks the Kurds have also modified their stance on the PKK-Turkey issue, and Satterfield remarked that the Turks are beginning to re-examine their approach as well.

¶6. (C) Adel expressed guarded optimism that the CoR would pass the De-Baathification Law and the 2008 Budget in the coming weeks (the former bill was passed a few hours after the meeting) but warned the Provincial Powers bill would take more time. In reply to Satterfield's request that he encourage the CoR to stay in session and forego a scheduled February recess, Adel said it was extremely difficult to make effective such encouragement of the CoR. He noted that CoR members had even ignored a call by the Marja'iyyah to stay in session during the December 2007 Eid al-Adha holiday.

Selling SPD in Tehran  
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¶7. (C) Adel briefed on his recent visit to Tehran, a trip taken at Iranian behest to "explain and clarify" the GOI-USG Declaration of Principles (see septel for additional readout provided in a January 9 Adel-Ambassador Crocker meeting). Adel said that he met with the top-tier of Iranian security officials (but not with Supreme Leader Khamenei or FM Mottaki due to their unavailability) and believes that Tehran has a better understanding of the GOI-USG security relationship as a result of his efforts. He said he told the Iranians that the GOI wants good relations with the USG and Iran. Adel said he detected strong Iranian interest in resuming a dialogue with the USG: he appeared surprised to learn that Tehran had not replied to our proposal of discussion dates, noting the Iranians had not told him of any conditions for participation in talks. Alluding to upcoming bilateral negotiations over a long-term strategic security

relationship, Satterfield urged the GOI to send forth a broadly-representative negotiating team in order to produce an agreement that the Iraqi Parliament can support. The VP affirmed that this was the intent of the Presidency Council and reaching agreement on an empowered and effective negotiating team would top the agenda of the Three Plus One meeting due to take place within days.

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